

# Literature and Language Education: An Analysis of Questionnaire Responses of First-Year English Majors at Bukkyo University in 2017

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## 1. Introduction

Why do we study foreign literature? Do we study it for the sake of literature itself or for the sake of acquiring foreign languages? We may well study it for the sake of both of them. Indeed the study of foreign literature can enrich one's own national literature or literature written in their own mother tongue. Lu Xun, the greatest Chinese writer of the twentieth century, claims that literature can be reinvigorated by the influence of foreign literature (112). It is said that English literature contributed greatly to the literary development of Natsume Soseki, the greatest novelist in modern Japan (Yamanouchi 26). Soseki studied English literature at the University of Tokyo and later held a lectureship there before starting his career as a full-time writer. British and American literature also have had a strong influence on other Japanese writers such as Kenzaburo Oe, the Nobel laureate, and Haruki Murakami, who has long been expected to win the Nobel Prize in literature.

Generally speaking, Japanese university students used to study English literature with the intention of mastering the English language and becoming English language teachers rather than study for the sake of literature (Usami 107). Over the past several decades, however, they have

been steadily losing interest in English literature. At present they prefer movies to literature as entertainment media, so that film studies might eventually replace English literature studies at university one day. In the past, literary works were commonly used as teaching materials in the English language classroom at university in Japan. But now English literature generally tends to be neglected at university, and some students and teachers do not regard it as the right tool for learning/teaching the language. The situation may not differ considerably even in English departments. English majors pay more attention to improving their communication skills in English than to studying English literature and do not have much interest in literature in general. Since 2007 I have been conducting research at Bukkyo University on the attitudes of newly entered first-year English majors towards English literature and English education through the study of literature. I am going to show an analysis of the questionnaire responses of the Bukkyo first-year English majors on their attitudes towards English literature and English education in the academic year 2017, referring to the responses of students in the previous years.

## 2. Overall Aims and Objectives of the Survey

- 1) To examine, through the questionnaire, whether or not university English majors consider that studying English literature can help them master the English language. Some researchers suggest that literature is useful in learning foreign languages in terms of the understanding of different cultures and the whole person education as well as acquiring foreign languages (Cf. Hall; Lazar).
- 2) To examine whether or not English majors think they should study English literature as the older generation did. The Department of

English at Bukkyo University was established in 1975 as a department where students were expected to study English literature rather than improve their spoken English. But in today's society, English communication skills are valued more highly than research skills in English literature. In consideration of these circumstances, the curriculum of the department has been revised several times and has now become language-oriented rather than literature-oriented.

- 3) To gauge the general knowledge of newly entered English majors about English literature. At Bukkyo University "Introduction to British Literature" and "Introduction to American Literature" are compulsory courses for first-year English majors
- 4) To determine English majors' reading habits in English as well as in Japanese.

### 3. Analysis

#### **Q 1) Do you think you should study English literature?**

About 68% of the students think that they should study English literature while about 4% think that they need not. About 28% answer "they don't know." Some of the students who answer "they don't know" say that it is because they do not know anything about English literature, and others say that it is because they do not think that English literature is necessary and useful for them.

#### **Q 2) When you read English, do you need Japanese translations along with the original text?**

More than 85% of the students say that they need Japanese translations when they read English. Some say that they want to confirm their understanding by comparing their own interpretations with the translations, and others say that they cannot manage to read English

by themselves.

**Q 3) When you read English, do you try to understand without translating into Japanese?**

About 50% of the students try to understand without translating into Japanese when they read English. In contrast, about 30% do not or cannot understand without translating into Japanese when they read English.

**Q 4) Do you like literature in general, whether it is Japanese or foreign?**

Nearly 30% of the students say that they like literature, while more than 30% say that they do not. About 38% answer “they don’t know.” Some students say that they seldom read literature and others say that they are not interested in it.

**Q 5) Do you like movies?**

Movies are one of the popular teaching materials in the English classroom. As you can easily guess, unlike literature, more than 85% of the students like movies.

**Q 6) Do you like movies in English without Japanese subtitles?**

However, only about 20% of the students like movies in English without Japanese subtitles while about 35% do not. About 40% answer “they don’t know.”

**Q 7) Do you think “reading English” is necessary to learn/acquire the language?**

About 95% of the students think that “reading English” is necessary to learn/acquire English.

**Q 8) Do you like books written in English?**

Nevertheless, only about 35% of the students say that they like books written in English, and about 40% answer “they don’t know.”

**Q 9) Do you read English other than as classroom activities and**

**homework?**

And 50% of the students read English only as classroom activities and homework. Some of them say that they do not have any opportunity to read English outside the classroom and that they do not have any English books available at hand. Just less than 5% of the students regularly read English voluntarily outside the classroom, and about 45% sometimes do so.

**Q10) Do you read Web pages and emails written in English?**

As for reading Web pages and emails written in English, about 60% of the students have never done so. Some of them say that they have almost no opportunity to access Web pages in English. One of them says that it is because he/she is afraid of becoming infected with computer viruses by visiting websites written only in English. About 3% (that is to say only two students) regularly read Web pages and emails written in English, and about 35% sometimes do so.

**Q11) Do you want to read English voluntarily outside the classroom?**

However, about 80% of the students have some degree of eagerness to read English voluntarily outside the classroom. About 7% do not want to do so. How can they improve their English without any voluntary study?

**Q13) Do you think it is helpful to read literature written in English in order to learn/acquire the language?**

More than 90% of the students think that reading English literature is useful in learning/acquiring English. Some say that they can improve their reading skills, and others mention obtaining knowledge and learning culture through reading English literature. No one answers “no.”

**Q14) Do you think a basic knowledge of English literature is necessary for English majors?**

About 70% of the students think that a basic knowledge of English literature is necessary for English majors. About 28% answer “they don’t know,” and some of them say that they do not know what English literature is and if it is necessary for them. And only 1.5% (one student) answers “rather no,” and this students says that as long as he/she can communicate with people [in English] in foreign countries, he/she does not care if he/she has no knowledge of English literature.

**Q14) Which is your favourite genre of books to read in English?  
(Multiple-choice)**

Novels appear to be the most favoured genre of books to read in English among the students, and 61.8% of them surprisingly answer so. Although poetry is generally neglected among students and teachers at university (unlike novels), 16.2% of the students show some interest in it. “History” seems to be the least popular among the students, and only 5.9% want to read something about it. The percentages of the students who are interested in Web pages and emails are rather low: 20.6% and 14.7% respectively.

**Q15) Do you know the following writers and works in British and American literature? Or have you ever heard of them?**

The students are not familiar with writers and works in British and American literature. However, the one exception is that almost all the students know or at least have heard of Shakespeare. It appears that two of Shakespeare’s plays, *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* are well-known among the students. Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, and the American writer Ernest Hemingway are rather well-known. Unexpectedly, 73.5% of the students answer they do not know Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, which has been made

widely known in Japan through the translation by the famous author Haruki Murakami. 76.5% of the students do not know *Gone with the Wind*, whose film adaptation used to be very famous among the older generation in Japan. The percentage of the students who did not know *Gone With the Wind* was less than 40% each year until the academic year 2014, and the lowest was 17.6% in 2009. The percentage has risen since then, and it reached 52% and 59.5% in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

#### 4. Conclusion

- 1) I have been doing this questionnaire survey since the academic year 2007 and found that the results of the survey each year are almost the same. Most of the differences between the results of the surveys are not statistically significant. We can say that the newly entered first-year English majors at Bukkyo University in each year appear to have more or less the same attitudes towards English literature and English education through the study of literature.
- 2) Newly entered English majors do not have any biased view that English literature is unnecessary or useless for them. They think that English literature is necessary for them not only as knowledge but also as a tool for learning the language.
- 3) The students do not have much knowledge about English literature, and, if I may say so, some do not have any at all. This means that they do not necessarily dislike English literature from the beginning. They are wondering if they should read English literature: “To read or not to read; that is the question”, as Hamlet might put it. What teachers should consider is how to introduce English literature to those newly-entered students and how to get them into the habit of reading

literature. There are several problems concerning this. I would like to point out two of them here. First, the problem of language: just as they do not like English movies without Japanese subtitles, so they will not like reading English literature in the original from the beginning. So we can have them read English literature in simplified English or even in the Japanese translation; film adaptations can be another possibility. Second, we should develop in students the habit of reading books in general, including reading in Japanese. Students spend more time listening to music and watching movies than reading books; moreover, they do not seem to know how to enjoy reading books, especially literature. This is thought to be one of the pervasive educational problems we have in Japan. I hear nowadays lots of teachers have students read books in Japanese for a certain time, for example 15 or 30 minutes, as a classroom activity at primary and junior-high schools.

- 4) I do not insist English literature should be the only thing students study in the English language classroom at school and university, but I would like to say that once they get used to English literature, they will find that it can be fun. From literature in English they can learn English culture, thought, ways and customs as well as the language itself. I wish I could conclude my presentation by quoting from English literature, but instead I will quote from the famous American movie *Casablanca*. If you students do not study English literature, I am sure you will regret it, “maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life”.

Thank you for your attention.

\* This paper is based on my presentation originally given in Japanese at the 1st Bukkyo University - Institute of Literature, Chinese Academy



of Social Sciences Joint Symposium held at the Xinhai Jinjiang Hotel, Beijing on the 26th of May 2017.

## References

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## Results of 2017 Survey

Date of survey: 12 April 2017

Number of students who answered: 68 (out of the 71 newly entered first-year English majors)

Q 1) Do you think you should study English literature?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
16	30	19	2	1
23.5%	44.1%	27.9%	2.9%	1.5%

Q 2) When you read English, do you need Japanese translations along with the original text?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
20	39	8	1	0
29.4%	57.4%	11.8%	1.5%	0.0%

Q 3) When you read English, do you try to understand without translating into Japanese?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
9	24	14	16	5
13.2%	35.3%	20.6%	23.5%	7.4%

Q 4) Do you like literature in general, whether it is Japanese or foreign?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
12	8	26	14	8
17.6%	11.8%	38.2%	20.6%	11.8%

Q 5) Do you like movies?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
41	18	6	3	0
60.3%	26.5%	8.8%	4.4%	0.0%

Q 6) Do you like movies in English without Japanese subtitles?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
4	10	30	17	7
5.9%	14.7%	44.1%	25.0%	10.3%

Q 7) Do you think “reading English” is necessary to learn/acquire the language?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
50	15	3	0	0
73.5%	22.1%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%

Q 8) Do you like books written in English?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
6	18	28	11	5
8.8%	26.5%	41.2%	16.2%	7.4%

Q 9) Do you read English other than as classroom activities and homework?

Regularly	Sometimes	Never
3	31	34
4.4%	45.6%	50.0%

Q10) Do you read Web pages and emails written in English?

Regularly	Sometimes	Never
2	24	42
2.9%	35.3%	61.8%

Q11) Do you want to read English voluntarily outside the classroom?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
21	34	8	4	1
30.9%	50.0%	11.8%	5.9%	1.5%

Q12) Do you think it is helpful to read literature written in English in order to learn/acquire the language?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
44	19	5	0	0
64.7%	27.9%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%

Q13) Do you think a basic knowledge of English literature is necessary for English majors?

Yes	Rather Yes	Don't know	Rather No	No
25	23	19	1	0
36.8%	33.8%	27.9%	1.5%	0.0%

Q14) Which is your favourite genre of books to read in English?  
(Multiple-choice)

Novel	Poetry	Newspaper	Magazine	Non-fiction
42	11	27	29	15
61.8%	16.2%	39.7%	42.6%	22.1%

History	Graded Reader	TOEIC/EIKEN etc	Web page	email
4	31	23	14	10
5.9%	45.6%	33.8%	20.6%	14.7%

TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication

EIKEN: Test in Practical English Proficiency

Q15) Do you know the following writers and works in British and American literature? Or have you ever heard of them?

Writer/Work	Yes/Know	Heard of	Never Heard of
Chaucer	3	8	54
	4.4%	11.8%	79.4%
Shakespeare	42	25	1
	61.8%	36.8%	1.5%
John Milton	5	13	47
	7.4%	19.1%	69.1%
Jane Austen	1	5	59
	1.5%	7.4%	86.8%
William Wordsworth	1	2	62
	1.5%	2.9%	91.2%
S. T. Coleridge	0	4	61
	0.0%	5.9%	89.7%
Lord Byron	5	5	55
	7.4%	7.4%	80.9%
Charles Dickens	6	7	52
	8.8%	10.3%	76.5%
Bronte Sisters	1	2	62
	1.5%	2.9%	91.2%
Thomas Hardy	2	3	60
	2.9%	4.4%	88.2%
Oscar Wilde	4	12	49
	5.9%	17.6%	72.1%
D. H. Lawrence	2	7	56
	2.9%	10.3%	82.4%
James Joyce	1	6	58
	1.5%	8.8%	85.3%
T. S. Eliot	0	8	57
	0.0%	11.8%	83.8%
W. B. Yeats	2	0	63
	2.9%	0.0%	92.6%
Graham Greene	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%

Somerset Maugham	1	0	64
	1.5%	0.0%	94.1%
Joseph Conrad	0	4	61
	0.0%	5.9%	89.7%
George Orwell	2	6	56
	2.9%	8.8%	82.4%
George Bernard Shaw	1	8	55
	1.5%	11.8%	80.9%
E. M. Forster	0	6	58
	0.0%	8.8%	85.3%
Virginia Woolf	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
Edgar Allan Poe	8	17	41
	11.8%	25.0%	60.3%
Mark Twain	0	3	62
	0.0%	4.4%	91.2%
Herman Melville	0	3	62
	0.0%	4.4%	91.2%
Robert Frost	2	6	57
	2.9%	8.8%	83.8%
Henry James	5	18	44
	7.4%	26.5%	64.7%
F. S. Fitzgerald	0	1	64
	0.0%	1.5%	94.1%
William Faulkner	0	6	59
	0.0%	8.8%	86.8%
Ernest Hemingway	16	26	25
	23.5%	38.2%	36.8%
O. Henry	2	13	51
	2.9%	19.1%	75.0%
John Steinbeck	0	3	62
	0.0%	4.4%	91.2%
Tennessee Williams	2	8	55
	2.9%	11.8%	80.9%

Arthur Miller	2	5	58
	2.9%	7.4%	85.3%
Saul Bellow	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
J. D. Salinger	2	1	62
	2.9%	1.5%	91.2%
John Updike	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
<i>Hamlet</i>	19	33	14
	27.9%	48.5%	20.6%
<i>Macbeth</i>	10	10	46
	14.7%	14.7%	67.6%
<i>King Lear</i>	3	7	55
	4.4%	10.3%	80.9%
<i>Othello</i>	3	16	46
	4.4%	23.5%	67.6%
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	56	11	1
	82.4%	16.2%	1.5%
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	16	15	36
	23.5%	22.1%	52.9%
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	0	5	60
	0.0%	7.4%	88.2%
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	0	8	57
	0.0%	11.8%	83.8%
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	8	29	29
	11.8%	42.6%	42.6%
<i>The Waste Land</i>	3	9	52
	4.4%	13.2%	76.5%
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	1	5	58
	1.5%	7.4%	85.3%
<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	37	26	3
	54.4%	38.2%	4.4%
<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	0	6	59
	0.0%	8.8%	86.8%

<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>	0	1	64
	0.0%	1.5%	94.1%
<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>	2	4	59
	2.9%	5.9%	86.8%
<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	1	2	62
	1.5%	2.9%	91.2%
<i>The Moon and Sixpence</i>	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
<i>Ulysses</i>	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
<i>A Passage to India</i>	0	2	63
	0.0%	2.9%	92.6%
<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	0	1	64
	0.0%	1.5%	94.1%
<i>The Third Man</i>	0	3	62
	0.0%	4.4%	91.2%
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	0	5	60
	0.0%	7.4%	88.2%
<i>My Fair Lady (Pygmalion)</i>	4	8	52
	5.9%	11.8%	76.5%
<i>Moby-Dick</i>	8	14	43
	11.8%	20.6%	63.2%
"The Murders in the Rue Morgue"	0	5	60
	0.0%	7.4%	88.2%
<i>The Old Man and the Sea</i>	4	6	55
	5.9%	8.8%	80.9%
<i>A Farewell to Arms</i>	1	7	57
	1.5%	10.3%	83.8%
<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	0	1	64
	0.0%	1.5%	94.1%
"The Gift of the Magi"	3	10	53
	4.4%	14.7%	77.9%
"The Last Leaf"	1	1	63
	1.5%	1.5%	92.6%

<i>Daisy Miller</i>	0	1	64
	0.0%	1.5%	94.1%
<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>	0	1	64
	0.0%	1.5%	94.1%
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	1	3	60
	1.5%	4.4%	88.2%
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	2	2	61
	2.9%	2.9%	89.7%
<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	1	5	59
	1.5%	7.4%	86.8%
<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	0	1	61
	0.0%	1.5%	89.7%
<i>Death of a Salesman</i>	0	0	65
	0.0%	0.0%	95.6%
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	3	12	50
	4.4%	17.6%	73.5%
<i>Gone with the Wind</i>	5	9	52
	7.4%	13.2%	76.5%

Cf. Academic Years 2008-2012, 2014-2017 ( $n = 721$ )

Writer/Work	Never Heard of
Shakespeare	1.9%
Ernest Hemingway	39.9%
Oscar Wilde	71.0%
Edgar Allan Poe	72.3%
John Milton	72.5%
O. Henry	73.8%
Henry James	77.3%
Chaucer	79.1%
Charles Dickens	82.1%
D. H. Lawrence	83.1%
Arthur Miller	84.0%
Lord Byron	85.7%
George Bernard Shaw	86.3%



George Orwell	87.0%
Tennessee Williams	87.0%
T. S. Eliot	87.2%
William Faulkner	87.5%
James Joyce	89.6%
Robert Frost	90.0%
Jane Austen	90.2%
William Wordsworth	90.8%
Bronte Sisters	90.8%
Thomas Hardy	91.4%
Herman Melville	92.9%
J. D. Salinger	93.5%
Joseph Conrad	93.9%
Virginia Woolf	93.9%
E. M. Forster	94.0%
Mark Twain	94.0%
F. S. Fitzgerald	94.2%
John Steinbeck	95.0%
S. T. Coleridge	96.1%
W. B. Yeats	96.5%
Graham Greene	96.5%
Saul Bellow	97.1%
Somerset Maugham	97.2%
John Updike	97.8%
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	1.0%
<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>	9.2%
<i>Hamlet</i>	17.8%
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	38.1%
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	38.3%
<i>Gone with the Wind</i>	38.8%
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	61.3%
<i>King Lear</i>	63.0%
<i>The Old Man and the Sea</i>	71.7%
<i>Macbeth</i>	72.0%

<i>Othello</i>	76.1%
<i>My Fair Lady (Pygmalion)</i>	76.1%
<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	78.9%
<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	78.9%
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	80.6%
<i>Moby-Dick</i>	82.0%
<i>The Waste Land</i>	82.5%
<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	83.2%
<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>	85.9%
<i>A Farewell to Arms</i>	88.9%
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	89.3%
"The Gift of the Magi"	89.7%
<i>The Third Man</i>	90.0%
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	90.8%
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	91.0%
"The Murders in the Rue Morgue"	91.3%
<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	92.5%
"The Last Leaf"	92.5%
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	93.2%
<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	93.6%
<i>A Passage to India</i>	93.9%
<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>	95.1%
<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	96.1%
<i>Daisy Miller</i>	96.3%
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	96.5%
<i>Death of a Salesman</i>	96.5%
<i>The Moon and Sixpence</i>	96.8%
<i>Ulysses</i>	96.8%
<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>	97.1%
<i>The Sound and the Fury</i>	97.6%